

THE FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE U.S.A. Mr. JIM CARTER, VISITED THE PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM

The former President of the U.S.A, his Excellency Mr. Jim Carter, recently visited the State of Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Gaza.

On Saturday May 13th at 7:00 p.m. the former President of the U.S.A Mr. Jim Carter visited the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the first and oldest religious institution in the Holy Land. The visit was organised with the cooperation of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, members of the World Council of Churches and members of the Council of the Religious Institutions of the Holy Land.

The former President Mr. Carter was escorted by Mr. Hrair Balain, Director of Conflict Resolution at the Carter Centre, Mr. Karin Ryan, Director of the Human Rights Program at the Carter Centre and Mr. Rick Jascula, Trip Director for the Carter Centre and Mr. Samuel Jones.

Present with His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III were members of the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre including the Elder Chief Secretary His Eminence Aristarchos Archbishop of Constantina and His Eminence Methodios Archbishop of Mt. Tabor. Representing the other Christian denominations in the Holy Land were: the Lutheran Bishop in Jerusalem Mr. Munib Younan, the Anglican Bishop Mr. Suheil Dawani, Rev. Fr. Naim Ateek and Rev. Fr. Olav Fykse Tveit of the World Council of Churches.

The meeting took place in an atmosphere of cordiality, mutual

trust and understanding. At the meeting, His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem addressed former President Mr. Jim Carter and his escorts as follows:

Your Excellency, President Jimmy Carter

Fellow Members of

the Council of Religious Institutions of The Holy Land

Distinguished Guests,

We thank Your Excellency for this important and cordial visit to our Patriarchate and for your attention to the work of the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land. We are proud to be within, amongst and most importantly, part of this distinguished community of the Holy Land in general and of Jerusalem in particular. We honour and pride ourselves to be patrons, guardians and participants in the continuing history and heritage of these people and this unique culture.

Jerusalem is the embodiment of the sacredness and purity that emanates from the three faiths of the Heavens; Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

We reaffirm the great importance attached to the involvement of the Churches of Christ and reaffirm that The Patriarchate of Jerusalem, also known as the Mother Church, embraces all initiatives that call for peace and justice in the world generally and in our beloved middle east specifically.

Promoting values of peace and justice is of paramount importance. Violence, aggression, hatred and bigotry produce unrest and insecurity; unfortunately have replaced peace and justice that produce security and prosperity. We firmly believe, now exists the possibility for the conflict and hatred to be turned into durable and just peace. One of the main roads that must be travelled to achieving this, is the road of Reconciliation between God and Man made in Christ.

The Patriarchate of Jerusalem is witness to the uniqueness of Jerusalem, which is a model for overcoming existing religious, cultural and ethnic particularities, without attempting to destroy them. The opportunity to experience how ethnical-religious entities and Christian denominations live together in harmony, despite the fact that the political environment is in conflict. The focus must always be on fortifying mutual respect and coexistence.

The importance of Christianity and its presence, especially in our beloved Holy Land must be emphasised protected and empowered for not only does it lend itself to keeping liberalism alive but is a great help in facing a difficult present day challenge, namely: the need to maintain the fabric of the societies within this region. This is an ingredient that is so crucial for the future generations across the spectrum of faiths.

Through providing welfare; be it social programs or education, the work of the Churches is clear and must be both supported and expanded.

We all, take this opportunity to declare our commitment to our mission which throughout the ages has been to first uphold Holy Places and Shrines as places of worship accessible to all the faithful, regardless of denomination and diversity; keeping the pilgrims and visitors flocking to this Land.

Your Excellency, distinguished guests, thank you again for being with us and for this opportunity to talk about what is so important to all present here today...peace and continuity for Jerusalem and our beloved Holy Land.

Wishing you every success in your mission and may the Lord almighty light your path and guide you to fulfilment.

Thank you.

His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III emphasized the fact of the diminishing Christian presence in the Holy Land, a community that is not even recognised as a minority, and He touched upon the Patriarchates' contention with the immigration wave and its effort to contain this by fostering, in a spirit of moderation and reconciliation, the relationship between the followers of the religions of the Holy Land and by supporting the common education of Christians and Muslims through the Patriarchate's Community Schools.

The former President of the U.S.A Mr. Jim Carter replied by thanking His Beatitude and the representatives of the other Christian Churches for their warm welcome and said that he considers as a blessing his return visit to the Holy Land, the place where Jesus Christ lived and was crucified.

Mr Carter added that he, as a Christian, regularly attends churches since a young age and preaches at Churches of the Lutheran denomination of which he belongs.

The representatives of the other two denominations spoke to the President and emphasised, as did His Beatitude, the difficulties that Christians face due to the tense political situation in the Holy Land. They referred to the separation of the rest of the Holy Land cities from Jerusalem. The leaders of the Christian Churches in the Holy Land have declared in a common statement in 1994 and more recently on 29th September 2006, Jerusalem to remain an open city for the two peoples giving freedom of access and worship to the followers of the three main religions.

In the conversation that followed, the former President of the U.S.A Mr. Jim Carter stated that his personal intention and that of the U.S.A is to support a resolution to the problem of the Israeli-Palestinian issue, the formation of two viable states; a viability based on designated and acknowledged borders, locally and internationally, according to the road map, based on respect of independence, freedom and security of

the citizens of each state.

Mr. Jim Carter mentioned that during his recent travels through Damascus, he visited the site of Apostle Paul's house where he sojourned. For the success of his peace mission Mr. Carter implored the prayers of all.

His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III offered former President Mr. Jim Carter a handcrafted silver plated manger, depicting the birth of Christ, as well as a precious volume of the history of the Patriarchate, printed in Greek and English, in celebration of 2000 years of Christianity. In addition Dr. John Tleel offered the President an autobiographical book entitled "I am Jerusalem" which comprises selected material from his personal archive about Jerusalem, the Patriarchate and the Greek Community.

The Chief Secretary's Office

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